

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for operating a radio station, comprising:
periodically receiving content files via a satellite uplink;
storing the received content files; and
retrieving, playing and broadcasting at least some of the stored content files in accordance with an electronic schedule.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the electronic schedule is at least partly derived from a network schedule that is provided to the radio station via the satellite uplink.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the electronic schedule is at least partly derived from a network schedule that is provided to the radio station via an internet connection.
4. The method of claim 1, further comprising generating the electronic schedule by merging i) a network schedule received from a content provider, and ii) a local schedule maintained at the radio station.
5. The method of claim 4, wherein said network schedule and local schedule are merged once an hour to generate the electronic schedule for the next hour.

6. The method of claim 4, further comprising, when merging said network and local schedules:

identifying breaks in the network schedule;

determining, for each break, whether the local schedule specifies at least a minimum quantity of content for the break, and

i) if the local schedule specifies a minimum quantity of content for the break, filling the break with the specified content; and

ii) if the local schedule does not specify a minimum quantity of content for the break, filling the break with the specified content, if any, and optional content specified by the network schedule.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the minimum quantity of content is at least ninety seconds of content.

8. The method of claim 6, wherein:

the network schedule specifies optional content for each break in the network schedule; and

if optional content is used to fill a break in the network schedule, all of the optional content specified for the break is used.

9. A method, comprising:

providing a plurality of affiliate radio stations with content files via a satellite-based content delivery system;

providing each of the affiliate radio stations with an electronic schedule that instructs an automation system of the affiliate radio station to retrieve, play and broadcast ones of the content files, thereby generating a near real-time radio broadcast.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein different electronic schedules are provided to the affiliate radio stations corresponding to each of a number of different radio broadcast formats.

11. The method of claim 9, wherein the electronic schedules provided to at least two of the affiliate radio stations each reference a given content file indicator; the method further comprising:

recording at least two different content files for the given content file indicator, and associating each of the different content files with a different token; and

in response to said different tokens, said satellite-based content delivery system providing a different content file to each of the at least two affiliate radio stations.

12. A radio network, comprising:

a plurality of affiliate radio stations;

a content provider, linked to the plurality of affiliate radio stations via a satellite-based content delivery system, providing content to each of the

affiliates in the form of discrete content files.

13. The radio network of claim 12, wherein the content provider uses a one-way link of the satellite-based content delivery system to transfer content files to ones of the affiliate radio stations.

14. The radio network of claim 13, wherein the content provider is further linked to the plurality of affiliate radio stations via a bidirectional internet return link that provides a backup connection for transferring content files to ones of the affiliate radio stations.

15. The radio network of claim 12, wherein the content provider comprises:

an origination component providing operators of the content provider an interface to record and manage content files that are to be transmitted to the affiliate radio stations; and

a distribution component to deliver said content files via the satellite-based content delivery system.

16. The radio network of claim 15, wherein the content provider further comprises an encapsulation component to encapsulate said content files prior to their distribution by the distribution component.

17. The radio network of claim 12, wherein the content provider provides content to different ones of the affiliate radio stations using only a single satellite channel of the satellite-based content delivery system.

18. A radio network origination system, comprising:

a user interface displaying a plurality of content file indicators corresponding to files that are to be distributed to affiliates of a radio network, wherein at least some of said content file indicators are associated with a tier indication specifying ones of said affiliates that may require a recording of localized content corresponding to said content file indicator; and

a selector tool that, upon a user's selection of a given content file indicator associated with a given tier indication, provides i) a selection that enables a recording of generic content for all affiliates not requiring localized content for said given content file indicator, and ii) one or more selections that enable a recording of localized content for each of the affiliates of a tier corresponding to said given content file indicator.

19. The origination system of claim 18, wherein the selector tool is a drop-down list.

20. The origination system of claim 18, further comprising a process to automatically and sequentially prompt the user to record localized content for

each of the affiliates of said tier.

21. A radio network origination system, comprising:

a tool to select either a first user interface or a second user interface for recording content files for a plurality of affiliates of a radio network;

said first user interface displaying a plurality of content file indicators corresponding to files that are to be distributed to said affiliates, wherein at least some of said content file indicators are associated with a plurality of different files that are to be distributed to different ones of said affiliates, and wherein said content file indicators of said first user interface are selectable by a user to initiate the recording of one or more content files for said affiliates; and

said second user interface, configurable to a selected affiliate, displaying a plurality of content file indicators corresponding to files that are to be distributed to the selected affiliate, wherein said content file indicators of said second user interface are selectable by said user to initiate the recording of content files for the selected affiliate.

22. The origination system of claim 21, wherein said first and second user interfaces present said content file indicators similarly.